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SUFISM WITHOUT MYSTICISM?
IBN QAYYIM AL-ĞAWZIYYAH'S OBJECTIVES
IN *MADĀRİĞ AL-SĀLIKĪN*

Introduction

*M**adāriğ al-sālikīn* (Ranks of Divine Seekers; henceforth the *Madāriğ*) is one of Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah's most well-known, and arguably his most developed spiritual work.¹ The *Madāriğ* is best understood as an expanded commentary on a terse Sufi classic, *Manāzil al-sā' irin*, authored by the renowned Ḥanbalī and Sufi master, Abū Ismā'īl 'Abd Allāh al-Harawī al-Anṣārī (d. 481/1089). Widely read and admired, the *Madāriğ* is appreciated among contemporary Arabic readers for its piercing spiritual and psychological insight, literary charm and its potential to bridge the Sufi and Salafi divide. In Western scholarship, however, the *Madāriğ* has received little attention. The most comprehensive treatment Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah's spiritual works have received to date is in Joseph N. Bell's work on Ḥanbalī spirituality, which establishes the *Madāriğ* as one of the last and most mature spiritual works of Ibn Qayyim al-Ğaw-

1 – The complete title is *Madāriğ al-sālikīn bayna manāzil iyyāka na' budu wa-iyyāka nasta' in* (*The Ranks of the Divine Seekers between the Stations of 'Thee we worship and Thy succor we seek'*; the last phrase being the Quranic verse, 1:4). Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah's earliest biographers, in particular Ibn Rağab, identify his commentary on *Manāzil* as *Marāḥil al-sā' irin* (*The Stages of the Travelers*) instead of *Madāriğ al-sālikīn*; I have not been able to discover how the current title came to be. The primary edition used here is *Madāriğ al-sālikīn*, ed. 'Imād 'Āmir, 3 vols., Cairo, Dār al-ḥadīth, 1996; all references here are to this edition. This edition is based on Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiqī's edition of 1972-3, and reproduces al-Fiqī's gloss. *Madāriğ al-sālikīn bayna manāzil iyyāka na' budu wa-iyyāka nasta' in*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥāmid al-Fiqī, Beirut, Dār al-kitāb al-'Arabī, 1392-3/1972-3. Al-Fiqī's edition is available online: <http://arabic.islamicweb.com/Books/taimiya.asp?book=81> (last accessed June 2010). In addition, I have used an excellent edition, ed. Muḥammad al-Mu'taṣim al-Bağdādī, Beirut, Dār al-kitāb al-'Arabī, 1994, for cross checking. This edition claims to be based on three manuscripts in Dār al-kutub al-Miṣriyyah: Ms. 5899 (dated 823/1420), Ms. 20523 (undated) and 20531 (one volume dated 1301/1884; two volumes dated 1316/1898). The latest edition to the best of my knowledge is by 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Nāṣir al-Ğulayyil, Riyadh, Dār Ṭaybah, 2002, which I have not seen. Another edition I have enjoyed reading is a two-volume abridgement for lay readers shorn of polemical issues: *Tabḍīb madāriğ al-sālikīn*, ed. 'Abd al-Mun'im Ṣāliḥ al-'Alī al-'Izzī, 4th edition, Beirut, Mu'assasat al-risālah, 1412/ 1991. Raṣīd Riḍā (d. 1934) declared the *Madāriğ* to be the finest work on Sufism and ethics that he had known, and edited the first modern edition, Cairo, Maṭba'at al-manār, 1912-15.

ziyyah.² Given its liminal location in Sufi as well as Salafi tradition, the *Madāriğ* offers valuable insights into the conceptual history of Sufism, and sheds light on some elusive debates on the nature of Islamic spirituality. While the purpose of this article is to delineate the main project of the *Madāriğ*, it also addresses the question of the relationship of Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah's spiritual vision to his teacher Ibn Taymiyyah's (d. 728/1328) and the nature of the much debated relationship of these figures to the historical discourse of Sufism.

Ibn Rağab (d. 795/1392), Ibn al-Qayyim's student, an eminent scholar in his own right, and his chief biographer, introduces him as "Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr, of Zur'ah, then of Damascus, the exegete, the grammarian, the knower (of God, 'ārif), Šams al-Dīn, Abū 'Abd Allāh ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah, studied Kalām, grammar (*nahw*), and also mastered the spiritual science ('ilm al-sulūk), the discourses of the Sufis, their allusions and subtleties (*kalām ahl al-tašawwuf wa-išārātihim wa-daqa' iqihim*)."³ Particularly noteworthy is his biographers' emphasis on Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah's qualifications as a knower ('ārif) and a master of the science of spiritual discipline (*sulūk*), without however declaring him a Sufi. He was a man, Ibn Rağab notes, given to

outstanding devotions and night vigils, exceptionally long prayers, deep and constant remembrance, repentance, humility and complete surrender before God, the likes of which I have not seen; nor have I seen any greater in knowledge, in the knowledge of the meanings of the Quran and the Sunna, and the realities of faith. He was not infallible, of course, but I have not seen the likes of him in this respect. He faced and firmly withstood persecution several times. He was imprisoned with the Šayḥ Taqī al-Dīn [Ibn Taymiyyah] during his last imprisonment in the citadel. During their imprisonment, they were separated from each other, and Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah was released

2 – Joseph N. Bell, *Love Theory in Later Ḥanbalite Islam*, Albany, State University New York, 1979, p. 98-101; for an excellent recent article with more comprehensive bibliographical information, see Livnat Holtzman, "Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, (1242-1350)", in: *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography*, Joseph E. Lowry and Devin J. Stewart (ed.s), Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2009, p. 202-223. In Arabic, see 'Abd al-'Azīm 'Abd al-Salām Šaraf al-Dīn, *Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah, 'ašruhu wa-manḥağuhu*, [Cairo], al-Dār al-duwaliyyah li-l-istiṣmārāt al-ṭaḳāfiyyah, 2004; originally published in Cairo, 1955.

3 – 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Aḥmad ibn Rağab, *al-Dayl 'alā ṭabaqāt al-ḥanābilah*, ed. Sulaymān ibn Muḥammad al-'Uṭaymīn, Mecca, Maktabat al-'Abikān 1325/[2004], vol. 5, p. 170-179, here p. 172. The last entry of Ibn Rağab's massive work is Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah; the editor of *Dayl* informs us that Ibn Rağab lived for four decades after his teacher, but found no better person with whom to bless the ending. For other biographies, see: Ibn Ḥağar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-kāminah fī a'yān al-mī'ah al-tāminah*, Hyderabad, Dār al-našr, 1392/1972, vol. 5, p. 137 ff.; Ibn al-'Imād, *Šadarāt al-dahab*, Damascus, Dār al-našr-Dār Ibn Kaṭīr, 1406/[1985], vol. 6, p. 168; Ibn Kaṭīr, *al-Bidāyah wa-l-nihāyah*, Beirut, Dār al-našr-Maktabat al-ma'ārif, n.d., vol. 14, p. 234; al-Šafādī, *Kitāb al-Wāfi bi-l-wafāyāt*, Beirut, Dār iḥyā' al-turāt, 1420/2000, vol. 2, p. 195-196; and Holtzman, "Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah", p. 222-223, for a more comprehensive list.

from captivity only after the death of the Ṣayḥ [Ibn Taymiyyah]. While in prison, Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah occupied himself with the recitation of and reflection on the Quran, which provided him with tremendous spiritual insights and discoveries. This experience also earned him mastery of spiritual discourse (*‘ulūm abl al-ma‘ rifah*) and entry into its depths, which he infused into his writings.⁴

In the *Madāriġ*, Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah's exceeding reverence and love for his teacher, Ibn Taymiyyah, is reflected perhaps more than in any other work. Bell speculates that Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah's spiritual orientation may have owed itself to his earlier association with the Sufi al-Wāsiṭī, who in turn was an admirer of Ibn Taymiyyah. However, the absence of any significant reference to al-Wāsiṭī in the *Madāriġ* indicates that al-Wāsiṭī's influence was minor at best.⁵ Bell's overall assessment that the primary spiritual and intellectual influence on Ibn al-Qayyim remains that of Ibn Taymiyyah seems to be correct.⁶ Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah often mentions Ibn Taymiyyah's spiritual virtues and opinions to cap off or decide between the words of the greatest early Sufi masters. He reserves his choicest invocation, *qaddasa Allāhu rūḥahu* (may God sanctify his soul), almost exclusively for “ṣayḥ al-islām” or “ṣayḥunā” Ibn Taymiyyah, while it is accorded to others only sparingly; Ibn al-Qayyim leaves his readers in no doubt about his extraordinary love and reverence for his teacher.⁷ In contrast with the common view of Ibn Taymiyyah's irascible temper, Ibn al-Qayyim's view of his teacher's disposition is different. He writes, “An eminent associate of [Ibn Taymiyyah] said [regarding him], ‘I wish we treated our friends like he

4 – Ibn Raġab, *al-Dayl*, vol. 5, p. 172-173.

5 – Bell, *Love Theory*, p. 93. Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Wāsiṭī (d. 711/1311) was an accomplished Sufi and an older contemporary of Ibn Taymiyyah. Al-Wāsiṭī is counted among Ibn Taymiyyah's admirers and followers, and was held in high regard by Ibn Taymiyyah himself. In the *Madāriġ*, however, al-Wāsiṭī appears only a few times in relatively insignificant contexts.

6 – Bell writes, “Throughout the evolution of the scholar's thought the fundamental theological positions remain the same, faithfully reflecting the doctrine of his teacher. It is, for the most part, only the style and the scope of his writings which set them apart from the compositions of Ibn Taymiyya.” Bell, *Love Theory*, p. 103.

7 – In the *Madāriġ* alone, this invocation appears dozens of times after each time Ibn Taymiyyah's name is mentioned, but only thrice for al-Anṣārī, and twice for the venerable al-Šāfi‘ī (d. 204/820). Furthermore, the invocation *radīya Allāhu ‘anhu* (God be pleased with him), which is typically reserved for the Companions, is accorded to Ibn Taymiyyah about half a dozen times, particularly in compassionate moments. One such occasion might help illustrate the point. In a different work, Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah writes, «The ṣayḥ al-islām, God be pleased with him, said to me, when I presented to him one objection (*irād*) after another: ‘Do not make your heart like a sponge for objections and doubts, such that it cannot ripen but with them, but rather like polished glass, so doubts may pass over its surface but do not stay within: its purity makes you see them, and its firmness allows you to repel them’, or something to this effect. I do not know of any other advice that has helped me repel doubts like this one». Šaraf al-Dīn, *Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah*, p. 102; see *Miftāḥ dār al-sa‘ādah*, no editor mentioned, Cairo, Maṭba‘at al-sa‘ādah, 1905, vol. 1, p. 148.

treated his enemies!’”⁸

This is not to suggest that Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah was an uncritical or slavish disciple: he differed with Ibn Taymiyyah on several jurisprudential issues, although I have not come across any spiritual or theological issue on which he flatly rejected Ibn Taymiyyah’s opinion. His allegiance to Ibn Taymiyyah does not negate Ibn al-Qayyim’s originality and contribution; the agreement between Ibn Taymiyyah’s and Ibn al-Qayyim’s teachings seems to be a result of their extraordinary spiritual and intellectual accord;⁹ Ibn al-Qayyim fully shared his teacher’s reformist mission, and his share in promoting it was no less than his teacher’s. As demonstrated below, although the fundamental ideas in the *Madāriğ* are shared with Ibn Taymiyyah, the development, argumentation, and deployment are Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah’s. His extraordinary discernment, organization, compassionate and elegant, but unpretentious, literary style, and ability to patiently engage intricate texts like al-Anṣārī’s—all virtues which complemented his teacher’s difficult writing and sharp temper—make Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah indispensable for us to understand the nature and potential of the two scholars’ spiritual and juristic contributions.¹⁰

Bell ascribes to Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah “sympathy for a moderate mysticism.”¹¹ A few years prior to Bell’s study, George Makdisi published an important article linking Ibn Taymiyyah to Sufism primarily on documentary evidence.¹² Makdisi’s study created much stir, and some scholars have since questioned the value of its evidence. Fritz Meier dismissed it cursorily in a footnote as a misunderstanding, on the ground that Ibn Taymiyyah “is in favor of ‘Apollonian’ intellectual clarity and against all forms of ‘Dionysian’ rapture.”¹³ While Meier is correct to be skeptical of purely documentary evidence of Ibn Taymiyyah’s Sufi connection, and granted that the true test of any such claim must be substantiated by Ibn Taymiyyah’s writings, Meier’s rejection is wanting if it is based solely on the assumption that Sufism is *essentially* concerned with rapture, ecstasy, and mysticism. This issue is further complicated by

8 – *Madāriğ*, vol. 2, p. 328.

9 – I suggest, in fact, that the relationship between the two may be best understood as perhaps the type of intense spiritual affection that we have become familiar with in the case of Rumi and Shams-i Tabrizi; see Shams-i Tabrizi, *Me and Rumi: The Autobiography of Shams-i Tabrizi*, William Chittick (trans. and ed.), Louisville, Fons Vitae, 2004.

10 – Ibn Kaṭīr, a student of both men, mentions Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah’s compassionate and courteous nature and beautiful handwriting. This description contrasts with what we know of Ibn Taymiyyah’s sharp temper and illegible handwriting— a trifle which helps shed light on the two scholars’ personalities. Ibn Kaṭīr, *al-Bidāyah wa-l-nihāyah*, vol. 14, p. 235.

11 – Bell, *Love Theory*, p. 94.

12 – George Makdisi, “Ibn Taymiyya: A Sufi of the Qādiriyya Order”, *The American Journal of Arabic Studies*, 1 (1973), p. 118-129.

13 – Fritz Meier, “The Cleanest about Predestination: A Bit of Ibn Taymiyya”, in: Fritz Meier, *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, tr. John O’Kane and Bernd Radtke, Leiden, Brill, 1999, p. 317, n. 9; originally published as “Das Sauberste über die Vorberstimmung. Ein Stück Ibn Taymiyya”, *Speculum* 32 (1981), p. 74-89.

the fact that both Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah consistently praised al-Ğunayd, d. 298/910), the acknowledged first master of the Sufi path (*sayyid al-tā'ifah*), and other early spiritual masters of Baghdad who later became known as “sober” Sufis. These Sufis embraced spiritual practices and psychological discourses without promoting antinomian practices or utterances. Furthermore, both Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah were willing to countenance even ecstatic outbursts (*ṣaṭahāt*) as a sign of weakness or immaturity, rather than outright heresy.¹⁴

Labeling someone a Sufi or not depends naturally on how one defines Sufism. Historically, however, Sufism was a diverse movement in terms of its theory, practice, conformity to the Sharia, and the types of ontology and epistemology its adherents have claimed.¹⁵ Indeed, the “sober” Sufism of al-Ğunayd, which attempted to contain mystical ecstasy within the Sharia discourse was quite influential in Sufi history.¹⁶ Thus, rather than equating Sufism with mysticism, it is more appropriate to understand mysticism as being essentially concerned with experiential knowledge and invested in the validity and authority of that knowledge, while allowing that as a historically diverse movement, Sufism was mystical in some of its manifestations and not others.

Mystical Sufism often challenged the exoteric scriptural tradition. Michael Cooperson defines mysticism (which he, like most others, unproblematically equates with Sufism) as “a mode of cognition that treats the objects of belief as objects of experience: what the Sufis call *taḥqīq* or ‘realization.’ The result was not ‘ilm but *maʿrifah*, that is, not new knowledge of any facts or doctrines, but rather the perception of an overall meaning in the world.”¹⁷ Such circumscription of mysticism or mystical Sufism, however, is questionable, because many such Sufis consciously opposed *maʿrifah* (gnosis, or inner, spiritual knowl-

14 – For Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah’s apology for the *ṣaṭahāt* of several righteous Sufis, see *Madāriğ*, vol. 2, p. 38-39. For the various ways in which Sufi masters addressed this issue, *s.v.* «*Ṣaṭahāt* or *Ṣaṭhiyyāt*» (Carl Ernst), in: *EF*. For Ibn Taymiyyah’s complicated view on the intoxicated mystic al-Ğallāğ (d. 309/922), see Yahya Michot, “Ibn Taymiyya’s Commentary on the Creed of al-Ğallāğ”, in: *Sufism and Theology*, Ayman Shihadeh (ed.), Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2007, p. 123-136. These studies establish at the minimum that a simple assignment of mystical, ecstatic, essence to Sufism and then opposing it with the externalist Sharia is fraught with difficulties.

15 – For a critique of essentialist understandings of Sufism in modern scholarship, see Alexander Knysh, “Sufism as an Explanatory Paradigm: The Issue of the Motivations of Sufi Resistance Movements in Western and Russian Scholarship”, *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, 42 (2002), 2, p. 139-173.

16 – For the argument that Baghdadi Sufism was socially conformist, and that it eventually dominated the intoxicated Khurasani one, see Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: the Formative Period*, Edinburgh and Berkley, Edinburgh University Press and University of California Press, 2007, p. 23-26 and Christopher Melchert, “The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century C.E.”, *Studia Islamica*, 83 (1996), p. 51-70.

17 – Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Maʾmūn*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 156, drawing on Max Weber.

edge)¹⁸ to *ilm* (knowledge), of which Cooperson's own account gives many examples. For example, Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261/875) declared that "some people are unworthy of mystical knowledge (*maʿrifah*), and so God has preoccupied them with worship (*ʿibādah*)"—worship clearly being a scriptural prescription.¹⁹ Cooperson also writes,

A renunciant might commune with a dead prophet and call the resulting 'prenatural communication' a *ḥadīth mursal*, that is, one known well-enough to be cited in an incomplete *isnād*. Similarly, he might commune with God and label the result a *ḥadīth qudsī*. ... Such claims provoked dismay among the scholars, not only because the attributions seems disingenuous, but also—one may guess—because the notion of continuing revelation of God's will negated the historical mission of the *ahl al-ḥadīth*. If any pious believer would receive message from God or the prophets, and if such messages could assume the apodictic authority of Hadith, there could be little point in preserving the historically authenticated practice of the Prophet.²⁰

These examples suggest, contrary to Cooperson's own definition, that many Sufis did not merely limit their experience to the "objects of belief" given in the Scripture, but rather made their experience add to, interpret, and often challenge that knowledge. For the purpose of this study, I will therefore define mysticism as a mode of cognition which does not merely experience ecstasy or divine illumination (*kaṣf* or *mukāṣafah*) of scriptural knowledge, but also turns that experience into discursive knowledge independent of scriptural knowledge.²¹ Mysticism does not necessarily oppose the Scripture but the crucial point is that it may, for mysticism claims a separate, often superior, epistemological authority.

Any inquiry about one's attitude towards Sufism must take these nuances into account. Going beyond documentary evidence, Thomas Michel's brief study of Ibn Taymiyyah's commentary on some statements from the famous Sufi master ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Gilānī's (d. 561/1166) *Futūḥ al-ḡayb* focuses on Ibn Taymiyyah's substantive attitude towards Sufism, while asking: what role did Sufism play in Ibn Taymiyyah's vision of Islam?²² Michel confirms what many scholars have observed, that "Ibn Taymiyya teaches no doctrinaire rejection of the Ṣūfī tradition," and concludes that Ibn Taymiyyah "integrates the

18 – The possessor of *maʿrifah* (gnosis), will be translated heretofore as "knower" rather than "gnostic" because of the misleading Neoplatonic connotations "gnostic" may infer.

19 – Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, p. 159.

20 – *Ibid.*, p. 169-170.

21 – This characterization of mysticism is in accord with William James's classic definition which maintained that the mystic's experience of the ultimate reality is both "ineffable" as well as "noetic." William James, "Religious Experience as the Root of Religion," in: *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings* (3rd edition), Michael Peterson et al. (ed.s), New York, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 36.

22 – Thomas Michel, "Ibn Taymiyya's *Sharḥ* on the *Futūḥ al-Ghayb* of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jilānī", *Hamdard Islamicus*, 4 (1981), 2, p. 4.

Šūfi striving for *ḥaqīqa* into the total Islamic response to God.” In addition, Ibn Taymiyyah fuses his “activist and voluntarist” approach to “the cherished Šūfi concepts of private inspiration and intuitive perception,” culminating into a system like that of al-Ġazālī in its scope, but different in its nature.²³ Michel’s study judiciously focuses our attention to the pertinent questions and is generally persuasive. He does not directly address, however, whether Ibn Taymiyyah may be categorized as a Sufi, and the nature of his system.

The *Madāriğ*, the most developed spiritual discourse by Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah and arguably an authentic development of Ibn Taymiyyah’s ideas as well, allows us the unique opportunity to explore the vexed question of their relationship to Sufism. This essay makes such an attempt, beginning with a brief account of al-Anṣārī’s *Manāzil*, followed by Ibn al-Qayyim’s key contentions in the *Madāriğ*, with a view to explore the underlying bases for Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah’s overall project. The enormous size of the *Madāriğ* prohibits any extensive treatment in a brief study such as this, yet the consistency of the general strategies and the conceptual apparatus that Ibn al-Qayyim employs to explain and critique al-Anṣārī’s work allow us to make some useful generalizations.

Al-Anṣārī and the Manāzil

During his lifetime, šayḥ al-islām Abū Ismā‘īl al-Harawī al-Anṣārī (less commonly known as al-Hirawī; henceforth, al-Anṣārī) reached the status of a celebrity, albeit a controversial one.²⁴ He became well-loved by the spiritually inclined in the Arabic West for his *Manāzil* and in the Persian East for his *Munāğāt* (Supplications) and *Ṭabaqāt al-šūfiyyah*, but also disliked by the theologians for his relentless opposition to Kalām. The sheer number of commentaries that have been written about the *Manāzil* is sufficient to establish its place as canonical in the history of Sufism. Al-Anṣārī’s three most important Sufi works are, in chronological order, *Ṣad maydān* (The Hundred Fields; in Persian), the *Manāzil*, and the *‘Ilal*; the last is an appendix to the *Manāzil*.²⁵ The two main treatises, the *Manāzil* and the *Ṣad*, have much in common, both being terse, mnemonic manuals to help Sufi novices commit to heart and adhere to the Sufi path. Both treatises divide the Sufi journey into one hundred levels (*maydān*, field, or *manāzil*, stations), preceding the ultimate level. Each of the hundred station is further subdivided into three stages: commoners or novices (*al-‘ām-mah*), the elite (*al-ḥāṣṣah*), and the elite of the elite (*ḥāṣṣat al-ḥāṣṣah*). While this tripartite distinction of the Sufis probably emerged in the generation following al-Ġunayd, al-Anṣārī’s treatises are unique in their extensive application of it to every spiritual station.²⁶ The *Ṣad* and the *Manāzil* have many stations in common, and their style of exposition is almost the same, privileging, one may ob-

23 – Thomas Michel, “Ibn Taymiyya’s *Sharḥ* on the *Futūḥ al-Ghayb*”, p. 9, 12.

24 – See Appendix I-A.

25 – See Appendix I-B.

26 – Jonathan A.C. Brown, “The Last Days of al-Ghazzālī and the Tripartite Division of the Sufi World”, *The Muslim World*, 96 (2006), p. 104.

serve, the splendor of expression over precision of meaning or argument.²⁷ The general tenor of both works strongly privileges the state of being lost in God as the ultimate goal and leaves many ambiguities about its modality. Differences, however, may also be detected; the later work in Arabic, the *Manāzil*, emphasizes the theme of annihilation of one's entity in God and union with Him (*fanā'*) to an appreciably greater degree.²⁸

Al-Anṣārī belonged to the line of ecstatic Persian Sufism, whose Ḥanbalī commitment nonetheless seems to have kept him from thoroughgoing antinomianism. His *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyyah* shows that he had profound knowledge of the early Sufi tradition.²⁹ Particularly noteworthy is his preference, against the general trend among Sufi writers, of Abū Saʿīd Ibrāhīm al-Ḥarrāz (d. 286/899) over al-Ġunayd, al-Bisṭāmī and others.³⁰ Al-Anṣārī's preference of the erotic symbolism and the ecstatic non-conformity of al-Ḥarrāz over the sober and contained discourses of al-Ġunayd, is significant in understanding Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah's commentary on the *Manāzil*. Among his contemporaries, al-Anṣārī's meeting with the semi-literate Persian Sufi al-Ḥaraqānī (or al-Ḥirqānī) at the age of twenty seven had a profound influence on the burgeoning mystic, which is visible in his works, although he himself avoided antinomian practices.³¹ Like al-Ḥaraqānī, al-Anṣārī's discourses are composed in rhymed prose, marked by a preference for intensity of expression over precision of meaning, and a disregard for theoretical self-reflection.³² Some scholars have suggested that al-Anṣārī was a major influence on subsequent ecstatic Sufism in Persia, in particular on Ḡalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (672/1273).³³

27 – See Appendix I-B.

28 – See Appendix I-B.

29 – Farhadi (see Appendix I-A) notes that al-Anṣārī's *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyyah* was compiled from his student's notes on his commentary on Sulamī's work of the same title, and that "no adequately edited text of the compilation has reached us," the best being Muḥammad Sarwar Maw lāyī, (n.d.: n.p., 1983). A. G. Ravan Farhadi, *ʿAbdullah Ansari of Herat (1006-1089 C.E.): An Early Sufi Master*, Richmond, Surrey, Curzon Press, 1996, p. 44.

30 – On al-Ḥarrāz, who was known as *lisān al-taṣawwuf* (the tongue of Sufism) for his eloquence, see Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Brief History*, Leiden, Brill, 2000, p. 56, and on al-Anṣārī's view of him, *ibid.* p. 135. Al-Ḥarrāz was credited by al-Anṣārī for the elaboration of the *fanā' / baqā'* theory, a concept which is often credited to al-Ġunayd. Al-Anṣārī reportedly said, "If only Abū Saʿīd al-Ḥarrāz were a little lame. For no one was able to accompany him due to his pace in the Sufi path. If only al-Wāsiṭī had a little compassion (for his novices). If only Ġunayd were a little sharper (spiritually). For he was too scholastic (*ilmī*)."
Farhadi, *ʿAbdullah Ansari*, p. 49. Elsewhere he says, "The sign for humanity (*niṣān-e ādmiyān*) was Aḥmad the ʿArab (the Prophet Muḥammad), blessings and peace be upon him, while the sign for the (Sufi) wayfarers (*niṣān-e rāhiyān*) was Abū Saʿīd al-Ḥarrāz. The earth was filled with al-Ḥarrāz and could not contain him." Elsewhere he indicates, "al-Ḥarrāz would have been a prophet because of his greatness. He is the leader of this affair." Farhadi, *ʿAbdullah Ansari*, p. 51.

31 – Farhadi, *ʿAbdullah Ansari*, p. 8, 15.

32 – See Appendix I.

33 – Chittick writes, "In a broad historical context, it is not difficult to discern two relatively

Al-Anṣārī's Ḥanbalism and aversion to Aṣḥarī Kalām were at least as significant commitments as his Sufism.³⁴ It is difficult to see how he reconciled these divergent commitments, given the Ḥanbalī emphasis on an exoteric understanding of the Scripture. It is possible that al-Anṣārī was aware of this difficulty, for we find some references to it in his *Ṭabaqāt*, where he writes about himself that he spoke stronger words than the mystic martyr al-Ḥallāğ, but that he was not spurned by the commonality because the meanings of his utterances remained hidden from those who were not suited to receive them.³⁵ More work on al-Anṣārī is needed to understand this aspect of his thought. Given the limited scope of this article, I will focus only on how Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah addresses al-Anṣārī's divergent commitments.

The Madāriğ

Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah's career as an author began in 728/1328, nearly three centuries after al-Anṣārī's death. His first engagement with al-Anṣārī began in *Ṭariq al-ḥiğratayn*,³⁶ in which he commented on al-Anṣārī's *Manāzil* as well as on Ibn al-ʿArīf's (d. 535/1141) *Maḥāsin al-mağālis*.³⁷ Bell suggested that the *Ṭariq* was "essentially a commentary on the *Maḥāsin al-majālis*", but this observation is not entirely accurate. *Ṭariq al-ḥiğratayn* is an independent treatise, which

independent currents within Sufism, without denying cross-fertilization. Ibn ʿArabī brings to fruition several centuries of spiritual ferment in Andalusia, North Africa, and Egypt. Rūmī brings to a climax a tradition of Persian Sufism going back to such figures as Anṣārī ... The influence of Anṣārī was especially widespread because of *Kāf al-asrār* (written in 520/1126), a lengthy Persian Koran commentary by his disciple Raṣīd al-Dīn Maybūdī and a rich source of Sufi teachings." William Chittick, "Rūmī and *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*", in: Amin Banani, Richard G. Hovannisian and George Sabagh (ed.s), *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 95.

34 – Al-Anṣārī was averse to the Sufi biographer al-Quṣayrī (d. 465/1072) due to latter's Aṣḥarism. This aversion was not a passing phase, because even after al-Anṣārī became blind at the age of eighty, years after composing *Mānāzil*, he continued to wage war against Kalām and was persecuted for it. Farhadi, *ʿAbdullah Ansari*, p. 144.

35 – Bell, *Love Theory*, p. 243; n. 42, p. 270-271. Bell notes that the earlier translators of this passage, Massignion and Beaucueil, were less than accurate due the difficult nature of this passage. For Massignion's detailed discussion of al-Anṣārī's views, see: Louis Massignion, *La passion d'al-Hosayn-ibn-Mansour al-Hallaj*, Paris, Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1922, p. 368, and its translation by Herbert Mason, *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1982, vol. 2, p. 222-223.

36 – I have two editions of this work available: Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah, *Ṭariq al-ḥiğratayn wa-bāb al-saʿ ādatayn* (*The Way of the Two Migrations and the Door of the Two Felicities*), ed. ʿUmar ibn Maḥmūd Abū ʿUmar, al-Dammam, Dār al-naṣr - Dār Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah, 1414/1994 (available electronically through *al-Ğāmiʿ al-Kabir*, 1426/2005), and ed. Ṣaliḥ Aḥmad al-Šāmī, Beirut, al-Maktabah al-islāmiyyah, 1414/1993.

37 – Ibn al-ʿArīf's work was characterized as an unoriginal "slavish" commentary on al-Anṣārī's *Ilal*. On Ibn al-ʿArīf and his relationship to al-Anṣārī's works, see Bell, *Love Theory*, p. 98, 242-243 n. 39 and 40.

systematically comments on some of al-Anṣārī's statements in the *Manāzil*, while only one large section of the *Ṭarīq* is devoted to a critique of the *Maḥāsīn*.

The *Madāriğ*, as Bell further suggested, was prompted by Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah's desire to distance al-Anṣārī from his monist interpreters. Nevertheless, Ibn al-Qayyim also aimed at refuting al-Anṣārī's position that all stations, including the love of God, are defective. Only the station of *tawḥīd*—by which al-Anṣārī means annihilative union, not the usual Islamic monotheism—is not accompanied by deficiencies.³⁸ Šaraf al-Dīn, the author of a modern biography of Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah, notes that the *Madāriğ* criticizes the Sufis on: (1) the doctrine of monism (*waḥdat al-wuğūd*), (2) antinomianism (*suqūt al-taklif*), (3) the separation of the Sufi idea of ultimate reality (*ḥaqīqah*) from the Sharia, and (4) the preference for subjective inclination (*dawq*) or experiential knowledge over (discursive) knowledge (*ilm*), and finally, (5) the implementation of techniques and ways of worshipping not found in the Sharia.³⁹ The first four points are mutually related and are indeed major concerns in the *Madāriğ*, and hence I will address them in the following; the fifth, however, hardly appears to be a priority in the *Madāriğ*.

Al-Anṣārī's brief original treatise consists of 100 spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*), and each *maqām* is treated in a paragraph or so. The *Madāriğ*, on the other hand, comprises three weighty volumes. While formally written as a commentary, the *Madāriğ*'s extensive prologue, critique, reordering, and reorientation of al-Anṣārī's work suggest that it can be more appropriately seen as an independent work rather than a mere commentary.

The *Madāriğ* begins with an eloquent and impassioned exhortation underscoring the unparalleled superiority and virtues of God's Speech, the Quran; it is "the separator between guidance and misguidance, conjecture and certitude," for God "revealed it so we may recite it and ponder it, seek its wisdom and its felicity through remembrance, interpret it in the best way (*naḥmiluhu 'alā aḥsani wuğūhihi wa-ma' ānihi*), testify to its truth and strive to establish its commandments and prohibitions." Lest the reader consider the Quran the source merely of exoteric knowledge, Sufi vocabulary is used seamlessly to emphasize the equally total dependence of inner knowledge on the Quran: "It is the book that

38 – See Appendix I-C for a note on commentaries on *Manāzil*, and a refutation of the suggestion that Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah may not have had the text of *Manāzil* itself and relied solely on al-Tilimsānī's commentary to it. On al-Anṣārī's dim view of all stations, including love, Bell writes, "‘*Ilal*’ was probably dictated in response to a question concerning a statement made in *Manāzil*. At issue was Anṣārī's pronouncement that all states and stations other than *tawḥīd* are accompanied by deficiencies (‘*ilal*’), or traces of the mystic himself. In the ‘*Ilal*’, the Shaykh substantiates his earlier claim by selecting ten of the most typical stations, among them *maḥabbah* and *shawq*, and showing how each, although necessary to the commonality, is a shortcoming in the elite. Love to God, the object of our concern here, is the ‘pillar of faith’ among the commonality, but it is the ‘particular blight (‘*illa*’) of *fanā*’ among the elite, since it implies the continued existence of the mystic.” Bell, *Love Theory*, p. 172.

39 – Šaraf al-Dīn, *Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah*, p. 381.

guides to Him whoever seeks His gnosis (*maʿrifatahu*), it is His path that leads the one who treads it (*sālik*) to Him.”⁴⁰

Regrettably, Ibn al-Qayyim laments time and again in the *Madāriğ*, in the name of pursuing the divine path, that men have not been shy to neglect the divine Scripture under the pretext that its usefulness was limited to ritual worship, the minutia of law, and other related matters that were the concern of only the superficial, the externalist. Ibn al-Qayyim wishes to emphasize the Scripture’s unrivaled place in guiding the lovers and seekers of God in spiritual matters and not only in resolving legal issues. In a poignant passage, he writes,

They have reduced the sacred texts to the level of the Caliph of our times: his is the mint and ritual mention in the sermons, but no authority or actual say in ruling. One who adheres to the Book and the Sunnah is to them ‘externalist’: a bit lacking in intelligence, while the follower of mutually contradicting and incoherent opinions of men is to them accomplished and learned. ... Do such men think that they can salvage themselves from their Lord by using opinions of men? Or by the abundance of their discourse and disputation? Or by their analogies and suppositions? Or by their allusions, ecstatic outbursts (*ṣaḥāḥāt*), or fanciful imaginations?⁴¹

The overall message is that the word of God is to be seen as an *active* medium through which the Living God guides, and not a passive recipient of men’s preconceived interpretations. Sufism is not alone in incurring this criticism: trends in jurisprudence (an “orthodox” science), Kalām (the most guilty of all) and *siyāsah* (rulers’ policies) are also seen as guilty of the same neglect of the Scripture.⁴² Al-Anṣārī too made references to the Quran in his *Manāzil*, often beginning every station with a reference to a Quranic verse. Al-Anṣārī was indeed considered an accomplished exegete (he was called an *āyah fī l-tafsīr*, a “sign in the science of exegesis”), and his interpretation of the Quran in his Sufi discourse is almost completely subservient to the prefabricated notions of that discourse. Ibn al-Qayyim’s implied criticism of al-Anṣārī, with both reverence and disappointment, is difficult to miss.

In keeping with his commitment, Ibn al-Qayyim begins the *Madāriğ* not with the esoteric wisdom of great Sufis as al-Anṣārī did, but with an extended exegesis of the opening chapter of the Quran. The very title, *Madāriğ al-sālikin bayna ma-*

40 – *Madāriğ*, vol. 1, p. 9-10.

41 – *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 12-13; The same discourse is almost *verbatim* later in his discussion of repentance from hypocrisy. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 314.

42 – “One group says: when reason and revelation contradict, we give preference to reason. Others say: when analogical reasoning and revelation contradict, we give preference to analogy. The second group, those advocating esoteric taste, spiritual disclosure, and inspiration (*al-dawq wa-l-wağd wa-l-kašf*) say: when the esoteric taste, spiritual disclosure and inspiration contradict the outwardly Law of God, we prefer the former. The third group, the men of politics say: when our policies and revelation contradict, we give preference to our policies. Thus each group has made a mockery of God’s religion turning instead to their false gods (*tāğūt*).” *Madāriğ*, vol. 2, p. 68-69.

nāzil iyyāka naʿbudu wa-iyyāka nastaʿin ("The Ranks of Seekers among the Stations of 'Thee we worship and thy help we seek'" [Q. 1:4]) indicates Ibn al-Qayyim's change in focus and source of authority, in direct contrast with al-Anṣārī.⁴³ However, Ibn al-Qayyim does not explicitly criticize al-Anṣārī on this issue. Instead, Ibn al-Qayyim frequently offers in his commentary the missing link between the traditional discourse on the Quran and al-Anṣārī's use of it, correcting al-Anṣārī's insights in a respectful and a conciliatory manner.⁴⁴ Moreover, to save al-Anṣārī from both the interpreters who twisted his writings for their monistic projects and the charges of heresy by others, Ibn al-Qayyim's overall attitude is conciliatory and reverential, as expressed in the following statement:

The ṣayḥ al-Islām [al-Anṣārī] is beloved to us, but the truth to us is more beloved! The ṣayḥ al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah, God's mercy be on him, used to say, "His practice was better than his knowledge."⁴⁵

The *Madāriḡ* is a voluminous and complex work, with a myriad of contentions. Several careful readings of it are necessary to realize that the fundamental project of the book is faithfully presented in its opening discourse, namely that truth is not known by the greatness of saints, but by a patient, loving, and reasoned encounter with the Scripture available to all believers. The spiritual domain is no exception to this general rule. Mystical knowledge, therefore, cannot be presented as superior or equal to the Scripture.

The Problem of Ontology: Annihilation (fanāʾ)

The issue which draws Ibn Qayyim al-Ǧawziyyah's most trenchant criticism is al-Anṣārī's contention that the annihilation of the seeker in the divine is the

43 – This title was most likely inspired by Ibn Taymiyyah's words that Ibn al-Qayyim quotes in the *Madāriḡ*, vol. 1, p. 79; Ibn Taymiyyah, in fact, was particularly fond of this Quranic verse, building his entire theology on the twin foundations of offering service to God and seeking His succor and grace. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Maǧmūʿ fatāwā ṣayḥ al-Islām Aḥmad ibn Taymiyyah*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Qāsim and Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad, 37 vols., Riyadh, 1381/[1961/1962], repr. Cairo, Dār al-raḥmah li-l-naṣr wa-l-tawzīʿ, [1990], vol. 1, p. 29-36, vol. 8, p. 73ff., vol. 14, p. 329, 421.

44 – For instance, al-Anṣārī begins his station of *taǧrīd* (divestment) with a Quranic verse which speaks of God's command to Moses in the Sinai desert, "So put off (*iḥlaʿ*) thy shoes" (Q. 20:12). Al-Anṣārī then immediately defines divestment on this basis: "*Taǧrīd* is to dissociate oneself (*iḥlāl*) from witnessing all forms (*ṣubūd al-ṣawābid*). It has three levels ..." Ibn al-Qayyim begins by explaining this odd association of meaning: "The reason for allusion to the verse—and what is given is not its explanation (*tafsīr*) but implication (*murād*)—that God Almighty commanded Moses to put off his shoes when entering the holy vale so that his feet might receive the blessing of that ground ... or for other such reasons. The point of the author's allusion here, however, is that divestment is the condition to enter into a sacred state in which one may not enter except through divestment". *Madāriḡ*, vol. 1, p. 384. This statement is only one example of the great lengths to which Ibn al-Qayyim went to connect traditional discourse with al-Anṣārī's use of the Quran.

45 – *Madāriḡ*, vol. 3, p. 364. I have been unable to find this statement in Ibn Taymiyyah's writings, although it is certainly implied.

highest purpose of the Sufi path and the most perfect of all stations. This contention appears under various rubrics, including *fanāʾ* (annihilation), *tawhīd* (oneness) and *ḡamʿ* (union). Al-Anṣārī's denial of causality was but a corollary of this contention. Al-Anṣārī, indeed, ends his treatise with the following famous tercet which summarized for him the ultimate station of Oneness (*tawhīd*):⁴⁶

No one testifies the Oneness of the One	(<i>mā waḥḥada al-wāḥida min wāḥidin</i>)
For any who does so is a denier	(<i>id kullu man waḥḥadahu ḡāḥidu</i>)
The testimony of he who utters His praise	(<i>tawḥīdu man yaṭṭiqu ʿan naʿ tihī</i>)
Is a loan, erased by the One	(<i>ʿāriyatun, abṭalahā l-wāḥidu</i>)
His testimony of Oneness alone is the testimony of his Oneness	(<i>tawḥīduhu iyyāhu tawḥīduhu</i>)
And the praise of any who praises is astray	(<i>wa-naʿ tu man yanʿ atahu lāḥidu</i>)

While this doctrine that disparages scriptural monotheism and piety finds its fullest expression in the last few stations of the 100 stations in the *Manāzil*, it informs this discourse in each of the 100 stations. Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, therefore, describes the station of *fanāʾ* in the very beginning of his treatise, and begins a refutation which he repeats and develops throughout his work. Ibn al-Qayyim's interpretation of these verses serves as a good example of his overall attitude:

The meaning of [al-Anṣārī's first] verse is: none may testify the Oneness of God Almighty as His special Oneness deserves. This special testimony is one in which all forms (*rusūm*), all accidents, and all created things vanish. One's testimony of the divine Oneness cannot be imagined except if the form—namely that of the testifier—persists. And this denies the reality of God's Oneness, in [the presence of] which all the forms and the created beings vanish. This is the best way to explain al-Anṣārī's verse "For any who testifies His Oneness is a denier." The monists (*ahl al-waḥdah*), however, explained it in accordance with their school. They claimed that this verse meant, that whoever attributes Oneness to God, denies His being above attributes.

The second verse "The testimony of he, who utters His praise ..." means that the testimony and the praise of the created being is loaned, borrowed. For He was proclaimed One before the testimony of the created beings, and will be so after the testifier vanishes. The One Himself will erase this testimony, when He annihilates all be-

46 – Ibn Taymiyyah mentions this tercet in his, *al-Ġawāb al-ṣaḥiḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ*, ed. ʿAlī Ṣubḥ al-Madanī, Cairo, Dār al-naṣr - Maṭbaʿat al-Madanī, [1964], vol. 3, p. 325, vol. 4, p. 497.

ings but Himself. The monist (*ittiḥādī*), however, interprets this verse like so: the object of this testimony of Oneness is One in all respects. The simplicity of His essence (*basāṭat dāṭihi*) rejects the complexity that might accompany the attribution of praise to Him. His freedom from any qualities denies the limitation that the attribution of Oneness imposes.⁴⁷

The monist (*ittiḥādī*) mentioned here is al-Tilimsānī (d. ca. 690/1291), who interpreted these verses in a Neoplatonic sense. According to al-Tilimsānī, these verses imply that the absolute simplicity (*basāṭah*) of the Divine Being defies any attributes.⁴⁸ Interpretations such as this are precisely the target of Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah's project:

May God have mercy on Abū Ismāʿīl [al-Anṣārī] for opening for these heretics the door of disbelief and denial, through which they entered, swearing that he was one of them. Nay, he was not one of them, but alas, the mirage of *fanāʾ* had deceived him; he took it to be the profound ocean of inner knowledge and the ultimate goal of all knowers.⁴⁹

The ṣayḥ al-islām is far above the heresies of the monists, despite his statement that could mistakenly lead to such conjecture, perhaps justifiably. He meant by "denial" (*ḡaḥd*) only witnessing (*ṣuhūd*), not existence (*wuġūd*).⁵⁰

This interpretation raises the question: was the "ṣayḥ al-islām" [al-Anṣārī al-Harawī] far above the "heresies" of the monists? To address this issue, we must consider Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah's typology of annihilation (*fanāʾ*): (i) annihilation of all existence but God's (*fanāʾ* 'an *wuġūd al-siwā*), (ii) annihilation of witnessing anything but God (*fanāʾ* 'an *ṣuhūd al-siwā*), and (iii) annihilation of willing anything except in accordance with God's will (*fanāʾ* 'an *irādat al-siwā*).⁵¹ Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah identifies the first type with the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wuġūd*, and considers outright heretical—the type of heresy interpreters such as al-Tilimsānī tried to attribute to al-Anṣārī. Ibn al-Qayyim ascribes the second type to al-Anṣārī and the majority of later Sufis. This type of annihilation is designated by terms such as *sukr* (intoxication), *iṣṭilām* (surrender), *maḥw* (erasure), and *ġamʿ* (union). In such states, some Sufis lose control and utter heretical statements which would lead to their "excommunication" if uttered in a state of sobriety and reason, but "with the loss of distinction and understanding, it may be that such a person is excused from blame."⁵² The norma-

47 – *Madāriġ*, vol. 1, p. 141-142.

48 – ʿAfīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī, *Manāẓil al-sāʾ irin ilā al-ḥaqq al-mubīn*, Tunis, Dār al-Turkī li-l-naṣr, 1989, vol. 2, p. 611.

49 – *Madāriġ*, vol. 1, p. 142.

50 – *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 143.

51 – *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 147.

52 – *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 147-148.

tive judgment on this type of annihilation is mixed: it is praised for the love, fear, hope, reliance and attention, inner and outer, towards God that it entails, and blamed for the loss of reason and distinction that it entails.⁵³ More specifically, this type of annihilation may have one of two causes: either the weakness of the recipient (*duʿf al-mawrūd*), caused by the overwhelming power of the experience (*quwwat al-wārid*), which is excusable, or the loss of knowledge and normative distinction, which is blameworthy.⁵⁴ This description is akin to the type of weakness Ibn Taymiyyah attributes to ecstatic or extreme behavior among some early ascetics and Sufis.⁵⁵ Finally, the correct type of annihilation in Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah's view, in agreement with Ibn Taymiyyah's teachings on utter love and servitude to God, is the third kind, to annihilate any resistance to the prescriptive decree of God.⁵⁶

However, the categorization of al-Anṣārī's view as testimonial annihilation (*fanā' šuhūdī*) has its difficulties, and requires Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah to go beyond what might be excused as interpretive license. When discussing al-Anṣārī's final station of *tawḥīd*, Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah makes a startling comment. Al-Anṣārī begins his definition with, "God Most High said, 'God witnesses that no god there is but He' [Q. 3:18]" omitting the rest of the verse, which goes on to say, "as do the angles, and those who possess knowledge and stand on justice." To leave out the rest of the verse is crucial to al-Anṣārī's point, because witnesses other than God contradicted the claim al-Anṣārī makes, as stated earlier: "No one testifies the Oneness of the One, for any who does so is a denier." Al-Tilimsānī and al-Kāšānī (d. ca. 730/1329) quote al-Anṣārī correctly, omitting the second part of the verse, and seize this opportunity to elaborate on this omission in their own way.⁵⁷ However, in Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah's presentation, al-Anṣārī is made to quote the full Quranic verse.⁵⁸ Is this an error on Ibn al-Qayyim's part? Or is this a charitable misrepresentation which enables Ibn al-Qayyim to suggest that al-Anṣārī, rather than flatly ignoring or contradicting the Quranic statement, is merely contradicting himself? I suggest that it is the latter, and that Ibn al-Qayyim, the Ḥanbalī reformer, is doing his best to protect the "ṣayḥ al-islām" al-Anṣārī from the charge of consciously contradicting the Quran and consorting with the monists. My preference is corroborated by the following: in explaining al-Anṣārī's statement that *tawḥīd* consists of "deeming God above accidents" (*tanzīh Allah ʿan al-ḥadat*), a statement which could be easily understood in a Ġahmī way (i.e., as an overall denial of the di-

53 – *Madāriğ*, vol. 1, p. 149.

54 – *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 150.

55 – Th. E. Homerin, "Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Šūfiyyāh wa-al-Fuqarā'*", *Arabica*, 32 (1985), 2, p. 219-244, here at 224-228.

56 – Bell, *Love Theory*, 74-91.

57 – Al-Tilimsānī, *Manāzil*, vol. 2, p. 601; ʿAbd al-Razzāq Kamāl al-Dīn al-Kāšānī, *Kitāb šarḥ manāzil al-sāʾ irin*, Beirut, Dār al-muğtabā, 1415/1995, p. 332; other commentaries of *Manāzil*, those of Manūfī and ʿAwaḍ (see Appendix I-A), also omit the second part when quoting al-Anṣārī's original text.

58 – *Madāriğ*, vol. 3, p. 406.

vine attributes)—Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah appears rightly baffled, for al-Anṣārī fought all his life against “Ğahmism” and what he believed to be its reincarnation in Aṣcarism. Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah resolves the issue by offering a clever alternative: the statement of the great Baghdadi Sufi al-Ğunayd, who held *tawḥīd* to be “deeming the eternal God (*al-qadīm*) above the created (*muḥdat*)”. Ibn al-Qayyim goes on to declare, “If the ṣayḥ al-islām [al-Anṣārī] meant by it what Abū l-Qāsim [al-Ğunayd] did, then there is no objection or confusion.”⁵⁹

Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah views al-Anṣārī as a *ṣubḥūdī* (testimonial) and not a *wuġūdī* (monist) mystic. This seems justifiable if we privilege al-Anṣārī’s Ḥanbalism over his ecstatic statements. All available information on al-Anṣārī’s life indicate that he uncompromisingly held on to the Ḥanbalī doctrine of affirming the divine attributes (*itbāt al-ṣifāt*). Even in his mystical writings al-Anṣārī avoided any metaphysical language related to God’s nature. He rejected the mild “Ğahmism” of the Aṣcarī theologians, let alone the full-fledged existential monism that Neoplatonic philosophy enabled later Sufis (like his commentators al-Tilimsānī and al-Kaṣanī) to assert.⁶⁰ But Ibn al-Qayyim’s attempt to place al-Anṣārī (and other ecstatic Sufis by extension) in his *ṣubḥūdī* category is not strictly plausible. Ibn Taymiyyah, in fact, understood al-Anṣārī’s position to be more seriously problematic and identified it as *inḥilāl ḥāṣṣ* (the indwelling of God in specific individuals), analogous to the doctrine of Trinity, in contrast with Ibn ‘Arabī’s existential monism.⁶¹

In dealing with al-Anṣārī, Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah appears more charitable than Ibn Taymiyyah, although this difference cannot be generalized to imply that Ibn Taymiyyah was more stringently opposed to mysticism than Ibn al-Qayyim. In fact, elsewhere Ibn Taymiyyah applies the same strategy of excessively charitable reinterpretation to an even more controversial figure, al-Ḥallāġ, as Yahya Michot has recently pointed out.⁶² While Michot’s suggestion that Ibn Taymiyyah approved of al-Ḥallāġ in one writing only to condemn him in his

59 – *Madāriġ*, vol. 3, p. 410.

60 – For a case that the distinction between *wuġūdī* and *ṣubḥūdī* may not be maintained, and that al-Anṣārī’s doctrine might not be that different from Ibn ‘Arabī’s in that respect, see Chittick, “Rūmī and *wahdat al-wujūd*”, p. 71, where he mentions al-Anṣārī’s phrases that define *tawḥīd* as a state of entrance or absorption into the Eternal.

61 – In Ibn Taymiyyah’s *al-Ğawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, p. 496–497, he discusses the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. There, he associates al-Anṣārī’s famous tercet with the doctrine of *inḥilāl* (indwelling). According to this doctrine, God indwells in the hearts of some saints. Hence, Ibn Taymiyyah identifies al-Anṣārī’s tercet with al-Ḥallāġ’s doctrine.

62 – Michot notes that Ibn Taymiyyah clearly condemns al-Ḥallāġ in two of his fatawa, but exculpates him from charges of indwelling in his comments on al-Ḥallāġ’s creed. Michot, “Ibn Taymiyya’s Commentary on the Creed of al-Ḥallāġ”, p. 124–128. Michot offers a reading of Ibn Taymiyyah’s comments, and ascribes to him “an explicitly negationist theology, reducing God to an entirely immaterial and abstract reality.” *Ibid.*, p. 131. However, the present discussion of how the *Madāriġ* deals with al-Anṣārī suggests a more persuasive model for interpreting Ibn Taymiyyah’s commentary on al-Ḥallāġ. In this frame, we should pay attention to Ibn Taymiyya’s key disclaimers such as, “if these words of al-Ḥallāġ are authentic” and “[Here is] one of the best manners to understand these words” etc. *Ibid.*, p. 129–130.

later *fatwas*, thus implying plain self-contradiction on Ibn Taymiyyah's part, is farfetched. In my view, Ibn Taymiyyah treats al-Ḥallāḡ in a fashion similar to the way Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah treats al-Anṣārī: a charitable, speculative, even implausible, re-interpretation of the problematic words of another to bring them in line with what one believes to be the right doctrine, in the spirit of the *ḥusn al-ẓann* (good thinking of others) ethic in Islamic tradition.⁶³

Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah's charitable interpretation of al-Anṣārī's view on *fanā'* also has a strategic purpose; from a close reading of the *Madāriḡ* it becomes clear that Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah wishes to shift the focus from ontology to epistemology—from the question of what type of annihilation might be the highest to the problem of how to know the divine nature or divine will. In other words, how to decide what type of annihilation, if any, is desirable?

Causality and Ethics

One of Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah's primary objections against theologians and Sufis in general and al-Anṣārī in particular, was the issue of actual or implied antinomianism. Let us consider, for instance, Ibn al-Qayyim's explanation of al-Anṣārī's station of disguise (*talbīs*), according to which God's prophets disguised the ultimate truths from their ordinary followers. One of the truths that the prophets disguised was the truth about the futility of causality (*asbāb*). By hiding this truth, the prophets made men think that they must attend to this-worldly causes (and hence earn a living etc.) as well as to other worldly causes (i.e., act righteously to earn God's pleasure). However, the truth, according to al-Anṣārī's doctrine, is that God's total presence and absolute power rendered causality entirely meaningless. Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah is beside himself in emphasizing how heretical such an idea is: "To suggest that God's prophets beguiled men in any sense is the greatest calumny." Yet his critique of al-Anṣārī is ever so gentle: "The author [al-Anṣārī] is the most steadfast of men in his faith in God and reverence for God's messengers and their teachings, but he was confounded by what has confounded some others. May God forgive us and him!"⁶⁴ In addition, al-Anṣārī's idea of disguise or beguiling nature (*talbīs*) of scriptural teachings is the necessary underpinning of his overall position. This position required privileging experiential disclosure (*kaşf*) over exoteric knowledge.

Al-Anṣārī's description of the 97th station of *tağrīd* (divestment) serves well to demonstrate several points made here. Al-Anṣārī says,

Tağrīd is to dissociate oneself (*inḥilā'*) from witnessing (created) things (*ṣubūd al-sawāhid*). It has three levels. First, the divestment of the essence of disclosure from the earning of certitude (*tağrīd 'ayn al-kaşf 'an kaşb al-yaqīn*). Second, the divestment of the essence of union from the reach of knowledge (*tağrīd 'ayn al-ḡam 'an darak al-*

63 – For a treatment of this doctrine see Fritz Meier, "The Priority of Faith and Thinking Well of Others over a Concern for Truth among Muslims", in: *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, p. 589.

64 – *Madāriḡ*, vol. 3, p. 374.

‘ilm). Third, the divestment of the essence of purity from the witnessing of the divestment [itself] (*tağrīd al-ḥalāṣ min šuhūd al-tağrīd*).⁶⁵

The first stage of this station is one in which reality becomes unveiled to the seeker through direct experience. Consequently, the seeker discards the belief he acquired through knowledge, either through reason or revelation. One who experiences these realities directly, of course, needs no reasoning or a third-party report (Scripture, etc.) to know them. The second level, Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah explains, is one in which the seeker

no longer sees any traces (*ātār*) of knowledge, for knowledge is the evidence of forms (*rusūm*), and the reality of union erases all forms. The one who has attained this level is ever between divesting and being divested. Reach (*darak*) here signifies consciousness (*idrāk*). It could mean: since the rank of knowledge is lower than that of true union, this status requires that any trace of the lower rank is removed. They (i.e. the Sufis) indeed acknowledge that this is the state of holy fools (*ḥāl al-muwallahin*) in the depth of their union.⁶⁶

But, by God, this is no perfection. It is, instead, one of the roots of antinomianism (*inḥilāl*).⁶⁷ For when one discards knowledge and its requirements, he abandons the light which unveils realities, separates truth from falsehood, and valid from invalid. Thus, when the disclosure (*kašf*) or the contemplation of reality becomes devoid of knowledge, it deprives the seeker of the very essence of faith without him noticing it.

This discussion underscores the emphasis on epistemology for both: al-Anṣārī, who insists that true spiritual disclosure (*kašf*) requires explicitly abandoning knowledge acquired from either the Scripture or reason, and Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah, who upholds knowledge and reason as being absolutely necessary for any valid spiritual experience. Once again, Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah does not stop at pointing out the enormity of al-Anṣārī’s statements, but goes on to offer an “interpretation” that the original text clearly does not afford:

The best interpretation that can be given to [al-Anṣārī’s statement] is that it is the purification of the state of union (*ğam‘*) from being reduced to mere knowledge. That is, one must not become complacent about the mere knowledge of the union, but seek to rise from the state of knowing to attaining it, all the while retaining his knowledge and never discarding God’s commands...⁶⁸

65 – *Madāriğ*, vol. 3, p. 384-385; Al-Anṣārī, *Manāzil*, p. 78.

66 – The reference is to al-Ṭilimsānī, vol. 2, p. 590.

67 – *Inḥilāl* here could also mean indwelling, but antinomianism is more appropriate in this context.

68 – *Madāriğ*, vol. 3, p. 386.

The theoretical ground for Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah's critique was prepared by Ibn Taymiyyah, who criticized al-Anṣārī's notion of *talbīs* (disguise) as undermining the separation of good and evil. Ibn Taymiyyah held up al-Ğunayd's emphasis on the necessity to "contemplate not only God's general will (*al-maṣṣ'ah al-āmmah*) but also [God's normative will, which is] the difference between what God commands and prohibits, and loves and hates."⁶⁹

The Problem of Epistemology

In Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah's view, the centrality of the problem of epistemology can be seen in the fact that the first task of the *Madāriğ*, even before the discourse on *fanā'*, is to explicitly address the foundations for proper spiritual knowledge and practice. The "Straight Path" stated in the first chapter of the Quran is the sole path of success for the human beings in every domain of existence, be it the exoteric or the esoteric, the legal or the spiritual, and that, Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah repeatedly argues, is the path of the Prophet and the early community. "Every science, practice, reality, or state, or station," indeed, all "realities of faith, that are the stations of travelers (*manāzil al-sā'irīn*) to God, all must be submitted for the approval of the Messenger of God, not the opinions of men, or their inventions, ideas, or terminologies."⁷⁰ Theoretically, this view was not disputed by most of his interlocutors. However, in Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah's view the Scripture was rendered futile by means of metaphorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) and other such excuses in favor of personal taste (*dawq*) and experiential knowledge. This is why Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah explicates at length "the ten degrees of [God's] guidance to the elite and the common people."⁷¹ The highest level is God's direct speech to a servant in a wakeful state (*taklīm Allāh 'azza wa-ğalla li-'abdihi yaqḏatan bi-lā wāsiṭah*); this honor was granted to Moses alone. The second level is revelation (*wahy*) directly to the heart of a prophet. The third level is revelation through an angel. These three levels of communication are reserved for God's chosen prophets alone, a line that definitively ended with the last Prophet, Muḥammad. It is Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah's absolutely central contention that these three levels of divine guidance are defined categorically superior to all other ways of knowing the divine attributes or the divine will.

The fourth level of receiving divine guidance is *tahdīt* (communication) by which certain human beings are informed of matters unknown to others; such matters are of practical and immediate import, instead of unseen or universal truths, and they are evaluated by the usual criterion applied to any statement about religion, that is, proof from the Sharia. This is an important, indeed crucial, point for Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah; for it is here that the epistemological

69 – Ibn Taymiyyah, "*Risālat al-ḥasanah wa-l-sayyir'ah*", in: *Mağmū' al-fatāwā*, vol. 14, p. 354-355; "Tafsīr sūrat al-nisā'", *Mağmū' al-fatāwā*, vol. 14, p. 358; "Kitāb al-qadar", in: *Mağmū' al-fatāwā*, vol. 8, p. 230-231.

70 – *Madāriğ*, vol. 1, p. 62.

71 – *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 43.

hierarchy could become compromised by self-professed saints. The grade of those who receive *taḥdīṭ* is both less than that of the prophets, and also than that of ‘the sincerest believers’ (*ṣiddiqūn*) who have no supernatural claims of knowledge. Paradigmatically, ‘Umar ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb (d. 23/644), who was considered to have received such inspiration on issues of policy and strategy, is known by Sunni consensus to have been second in merit to Abū Bakr (d. 13/634). However, Abū Bakr received no such inspiration, and his merit lay in his earnest trust and faith (i.e., his being a *ṣiddiq*). This defining contention of Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, like most others, has a Taymiyyan stamp:

I heard the ṣayḥ al-islām Ibn Taymiyyah, may God have mercy on him, say, “It is established [by the aforementioned *ḥadīṭ*⁷²] that there were such men in [prophetic] communities before us, while their presence in our community is probable, despite the superiority of this community of ours. It is so because the earlier communities were in need of such men, while this community is in no need of them due to the perfection (*kamāl*) of its Prophet and his message. God has left this community in no need for someone inspired by *taḥdīṭ* or *ilhām*, experiential disclosure (*kaṣf*) or dream (*manām*). This is due to the finality and excellence of this community, not due to any deficiency.” A *muḥaddat* is one who is secretly communicated by God something that comes true. Our ṣayḥ further said, “[the rank of] a *ṣiddiq* is superior to that of one inspired (*muḥaddat*), because his utmost sincerity and submission leaves him in no need of such communication (*taḥdīṭ*), inspiration (*ilhām*), or divine disclosure (*kaṣf*). Such a person has submitted with all his heart his interior and exterior to the Messenger, and so that leaves him in no need of what is from him[self].” He further said, “This inspired person [i.e. ‘Umar] would juxtapose this inspiration against what the Messenger taught. If it was in accordance with the latter, he accepted it, else, he rejected it.” Thus, it is established that the rank of utmost sincerity is above that of such secret divine communication (*taḥdīṭ*). Many who speak out of their ignorance and imagination [when asked for evidence or authority] say, “My heart informed me on the authority of my Lord.” True, his heart has informed him, but how do we know on whose authority: his Devil’s or his Lord’s?⁷³

72 – One *ḥadīṭ* has it, “In the communities before you, there were men who were inspired; if there is such a man in this community, it would be ‘Umar ibn al-Ḥaṭṭāb. (*innahu kāna fī al-umami qablaḳum muḥaddatūn fa-in yakun fī ḥādīhi al-ummati fa-‘Umaru bnu al-Ḥaṭṭāb*)” *Madāriḡ*, vol. 1, p. 45. This *ḥadīṭ* is reported in al-Buḥārī, *al-Ġāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed.s Maḡd al-Dīn al-Ḥaṭīb et al., Cairo, al-Maktabah al-salafiyyah, 1400/[1979-1980], vol. 3, p. 16 (*Kitāb fa-dā’ il al-ṣaḥābah, Bāb manāqib ‘Umar*). For further references, see: Arent Jan Wensinck, *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane*, Leiden, Brill, 1936, vol. 1, p. 434.

73 – *Madāriḡ*, vol. 1, p. 45-46; for Ibn Taymiyyah’s discourse to this effect, see “Kitāb tawḥīd al-rubūbiyyah”, in: *Maḡmū‘ al-fatāwā*, vol. 2, p. 226; “Su’ila ‘an islām Mu‘āwiyah”, vol. 4, p. 469; “Tafsīr sūrat al-iḥlās”, vol. 17, p. 46; especially in Ibn Taymiyyah’s commentary on ‘Abd

The point here is not that experiential knowledge (*kaşf* or *ilhām*) has no validity or significance; indeed, elsewhere Ibn Taymiyyah considers this knowledge a better and more valuable source of deciphering truth than “weak analogies, weak *ḥadīths*, weak literal arguments (*ẓawābir*), and weak *istiḥābs* (juristic preference for the status quo) which are employed by many of those who delve into the principles, differences, and systematizing of *fiqh*.”⁷⁴ Subjective experiential knowledge, however, cannot be the source of norms *independent* of scriptural knowledge.

This discussion brings us back to the question of what value the *Madāriğ* assigns to the historical tradition of Sufism which increasingly thrived on mystical knowledge. One clear passage alludes to Ibn Qayyim al-Gawziyyah’s concept of what constitutes truly valid spiritual discourses:

The best discourse regarding these [spiritual] stations is that of the early *imāms* of these people (*a’immat al-qawm*) [*qawm* here means the Sufis], who spoke of each station in its own right by way of explaining its reality, requisites, obstacles, and its general and special levels, without imposed ordering. These *imāms* of the path who have discoursed on this topic in this way include Sahl ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996), al-Ḡunayd, Yaḥyā ibn Mu‘āḍ al-Rāzī (d. 258/872), and even those higher than these men in status, such as Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (d. 215/830), ‘Awn ibn ‘Abd Allāh (d. 192/808) who is known as the *ḥakīm* (sage) of this *ummah*, and others. Their discourse on the actions of the heart and its states was comprehensive, thorough, accessible and unconstrained by artificial ordering or specific count of the stations. Their concerns were loftier than these trivialities. Their concerns hovered around deriving wisdom and knowledge, purification of hearts and souls and rectification of behavior. It is for this reason that their discourse is small in quantity, but all the same has much blessing, while the lengthy discourses of those who came later have little benefit.⁷⁵

Ibn Qayyim al-Ḡawziyyah then laments the spiritual incapacity of the later Sufis, who belittle the unaffected spirituality of the early Islamic community. Despite the deviations of the later Sufis, he offers an apology for still employing their language:

But it is unavoidable to address the people of a time in their language, for they do not have the spiritual capacity to receive the spiritual way (*sulūk*) and discourses of the early masters (*salaf*). Indeed, if the way and the state of the early masters were shown to them, they would find it strange, dismiss it as the commoners’ way, and dispute that the true elite have a different path. ... [They] are veiled from the value of the early masters, their depth of knowledge, dislike of affectation, and wholeness of insight. By God, the later scholars have not

al-Qādir al-Ḡilānī’s *Futūḥ al-ḡayb*, in: *Maḡmū‘ al-fatāwā*, vol. 10, p. 476.

74 – Thomas Michel, “Ibn Taymiyya’s *Sharḥ* on the *Futūḥ al-Ghayb*”, p. 8.

75 – *Madāriğ*, vol. 1, p. 133.

distinguished themselves from the earlier ones except in affectation and indulgence in minutia...⁷⁶

Here, his attitude may be summarized by the famous aphorism expressed by a fourth century Sufi, "Today, Sufism is a name without a reality, whereas before it was a reality without a name."⁷⁷ For Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah this was a solid, palpable, historical fact, not a romantic exhortation; and his project is to point out precisely those errors that have deterred the spiritual discourses from their true function.

Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah censured the Sufi discourse for not only its increased affectation, but also for its increased elitism. In line with his teacher, Ibn Taymiyyah, he criticized the tripartite gradation of each station that al-Anṣārī had introduced: "Their division [of each station into the commoners, the elite, and the elite of the elite], in fact only emerges from their making of *fanā'* the ultimate object of this path, and signpost of their destination."⁷⁸ He then questions the very essence of the hierarchical edifice that Sufi authors imposed on the spiritual relationship to God:

The ordering that every author of these stations claims is not devoid of arbitrariness (*taḥakkum*) and unfounded claims (*da'wah min ġayr muṭābaqah*). For when a servant adheres to Islam, he enters into all of them, and may attain the external as well as the internal aspects of his stations and states. In each one of his commitments and obligations, he encounters stations and states such that without accomplishing the latter he cannot fulfill the former. As soon as he completes one obligation, he encounters another, and as soon as he attains one station, he faces another. He might face the highest of the stations and states in the beginning of his journey, and the state of love, contentment, and tranquility might open up to him which cannot be attained by another seeker except towards the end of his journey. Besides, an experienced seeker is in need of stations such as insight, repentance, and self-evaluation (*muḥāsabah*) even more than a begin-

76 – *Madāriğ*, vol. 1, p. 133.

77 – This famous statement (*al-taṣawwuf al-yawma 'smun bi-lā ḥaqīqati wa-qad kāna min qablu ḥaqīqatan bi-lā 'smin*) seems to have been made first by Abū al-Ḥasan Fūṣanğī in the fourth/tenth century, and appears a century later in Huğviri; see Martin Lings, *What is Sufism?*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975, p. 45. See also, William Chittick, *Faith and Practice of Islam: Three Thirteenth Century Sufi Texts*, Albany, State University New York Press, 1992, p. 20.

78 – *Madāriğ*, vol. 1, p. 132. Also, "Among the stations are some that are composed to two or more, and others in which all of the stations are combined." *Madāriğ*, vol. 1, p. 130. Ibn Taymiyyah wrote, "The author of *Manāzil al-sā'irin* mentions three rankings in each chapter. The first ranking, the lowest in their view, conforms to the *ṣar'*; the second sometimes conforms to the first ranking and sometimes opposes it; the third ranking, in the majority of cases, opposes the first ranking, especially in cases of *tawḥīd*, *fanā'*, *rağā'*, and the like." Ibn Taymiyyah, "al-Furqān bayna l-ḥaqq wa-l-bāṭil", in: *Mağmū' al-fatāwā*, vol. 13, p. 229.

ner. Hence, there is no generally applicable and indispensable order for this path.⁷⁹

Every station for Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah becomes connected to all others in multiple ways, and any ordering becomes arbitrary. A believer enters every station as soon as he or she professes to be a Muslim; the presumption of unquestioned spiritual superiority and incorruptibility of some “elite” is as questionable as the corresponding degradation of the spiritual experience of the common believers.

Furthermore, this emphasis on the superiority of the early, spiritually egalitarian, community of believers serves a dual-purpose: It moderates any later figure’s claim of superiority based on mystical knowledge or philosophical argument, thus setting an upper limit on the self-aggrandizing claims that characterized later Sufi discourses. Also, the preference for the socially and politically engaged life of the early community serves as the point of departure from where the later Sufis’ moral passivity and denial of causality could be critiqued.⁸⁰ The spiritual model upheld by Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah is an altogether different than the one implied by al-Anṣārī: al-Anṣārī’s world is populated by great saints, against whose inner knowledge and spirituality the common believer, even the common Sufi, is but a wretched and even deluded fellow who must live by the “noble lie” of the disguise (*talbīs*) that the exterior of the Scripture represents. However, in Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah’s model, the ordinary believers’ encounter with the Scripture is essentially valid and efficacious. And even though the twin obstacles of their uncontrolled “desires” and uncured “doubts” veil men’s thoughts and divert actions from truth and righteousness, these obstacles are equally distributed between beginners and masters, and ultimately surmountable by anyone who tries hard enough.⁸¹ Surmountable they are, indeed, but only through the type of Scripture-based exposition and reflection that the *Madāriğ* invites, without any need for strict hierarchies, ecstatic outbursts or esoteric knowledge.

Finally, Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah’s spiritual seeker is offered a powerful alternative to both the existential and the testimonial kinds of annihilation: he sees, with the eye of his heart, God *acting*, that is, controlling, dispensing, giving, taking, judging, forgiving, and loving, and is overwhelmed by the beauty and benevolence of divine wisdom and action, surrendering his will to Him,

The essence of it all is that your heart sees the Lord, blessed is He,
settled on His throne, uttering His commandments and prohibitions,

79 – *Madāriğ*, vol. 1, p. 132. Elsewhere, another reflective passage was interjected between explanations of al-Anṣārī’s words, “The division of the seekers of God into the seeker (*ṭālib*), the traveler (*ṣā’ir*), and the one who reached (*wāṣil*), or into the seeker (*murīd*) and the sought after (*murād*), is idle, and has no reality. For if any of the search, the journey, and the intention leave a servant, he or she becomes disconnected from God altogether.” *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 111.

80 – *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 398, 404.

81 – The twin detractors from the straight path, doubts (*ṣubuhāt*) and desires (*ṣahwāt*) frequently appear together in the *Madāriğ*. See for instance, vol. 1, p. 17, 299.

watching over the world, high and low, its persons and beings, hearing their voices, watching over their consciences and innermost secrets; the affairs of the worldly kingdoms under His command, descending from Him and rising up to Him; His slaves in front of Him, establishing His commands; Him, adorned with all the attributes of perfection, extolled by all manner of praise, untouched by any defects, failings, or similes; He is as He has qualified Himself in His Book, above what His creatures attribute to Him: Alive, who dies not; Vigilant, who slumbers not; All-knowing, from whose knowledge is hidden naught in the heavens and the earth, not even the weight of a mustard seed; All-seeing, who sees the slightest movement of a black ant in a black night on a black rock; All-hearing, who hears the faintest of sounds, in variety of tongues and diversity of needs. His words are perfect in truth and justice, His attribute far above analogy or likeness with His creation, His being above being compared with beings in essence. His acts have encompassed His creation in justice, wisdom, mercy, beneficence and grace. His alone is all creation and all command. His is all blessing and all grace. His is all dominion and all praise. His is adulation and glory. He is the First, before Him is naught, the Last, after Him is naught, the Dominant, above Him is naught, the Hidden, other than Him is naught. ... Who, after creating the world, has written under His throne, "My mercy shall overwhelm my wrath!"⁸²

Conclusion

In this essay, I have identified two main axes of Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah's critical commentary on al-Anṣārī's work: Ibn al-Qayyim's unity of epistemology over and against al-Anṣārī's duality of knowledge versus gnosis (*ma'rifah*); and his privileging of loving obedience to the divine (annihilation of the servant's will into God's) over al-Anṣārī's annihilation or ecstatic union. Al-Anṣārī's potentially unwieldy comments that smack of existential monism (*fanā' 'an wuġūd al-siwā*) are salvaged by Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah through the notion of testimonial annihilation (*fanā' 'an šuhūd al-siwā*). Neither Ibn Qayyim al-Ğawziyyah nor Ibn Taymiyyah deemed this latter notion of testimonial annihilation heretical in itself—such moments of ecstasy are quite possible for a worshipper—but they are far from the highest goal of the man-God relationship. Such a state is inferior to the active, loving obedience to God that the Quranic prophets preach. This Quranic vision of worship is tactfully labeled by the two scholars as annihilation in divine will (*fanā' 'an irādat al-siwā*) as a powerful alternative to the earlier two. The greatest of man's calling is to love God while cognizant of God's law and in active submission to it. This love must manifest itself in one's willing to engage the material world as much as in his sighs of love and tears of

82 – *Madāriġ*, vol. 1, p. 120-121. The same discourse is repeated in slightly different words later in the discussion of the station of *mu'āyanah* (direct observation). *Madāriġ*, vol. 3, p. 234.

longing for the divine. Ecstatic union is a passing state that a lover may feel, and to the extent that it is a noble delusion that results from man's weakness, it may be indulged: one may even be pardoned, by God and by law, for issuing heretical statements. Following al-Ġunayd and the sober Sufi tradition of Baghdad, ecstatic outbursts are excused as a sign of immaturity. Only when doctrinally defended, systematically expounded and preached do they become harmful. They become a mirage that can delude even as great a man as al-Anṣārī.

These contentions may be restated as follows: without identifying themselves as Sufis, Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah and Ibn Taymiyyah endorsed Sufism devoid of mysticism, and wished to recover the earliest tradition of Sufism when mystical knowledge had not challenged the primacy of scriptural knowledge. This rejection of mysticism was not a rejection of divine disclosure (*kašf*) and other spiritual states, but of its epistemological independence. Experiential knowledge, in other words, could *confirm* the scriptural truths or deepen their meaning, but it could not speak on its own or contradict the Scripture. And even though Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah and Ibn Taymiyyah believed early Sufism to be a valid, indeed praiseworthy, discourse, the historical development of Sufism in a mystical direction kept them from identifying themselves with what Sufism had become. The *Madāriġ* is our best testimony to the fact that Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, in keeping with the vision of his teacher, did not wish to throw out the baby with the bathwater, and went even beyond his teacher in meticulously distilling what he believed to be the salvageable aspects of the Sufi tradition.

Appendix I. *Al-Anṣārī al-Harawī and his Manāzil*

A. *On Anṣārī's Life*

Al-Anṣārī is introduced in Ḥanbalī biographies as a jurist (*faqīh*), exegete (*mufas-sir*), master of Hadith (*ḥāfiẓ*), Sufi, and preacher. For a figure of that period, al-Anṣārī's life is surprisingly well-known.⁸³ He was born in Herāt to a devoted Sufi shopkeeper named Abū Maṣṣūr, who associated with some Ġunaydī Sufis in Balḥ, and who left his family for a life of Sufi devotion when al-Anṣārī was still young. The young boy, who lived in poverty with his mother, had a prodigious memory and signs of promise, and became attached to a local Sufi convent (*ḥanqāh*) under the tutelage of a certain Ṣayḥ ʿAmū. He also learned Quran under Yahyā ibn ʿAmmār al-Ṣaybānī, who instilled in his disciple opposition to rationalist Kalām and Aṣʿarī theology. These influences defined the rest of al-Anṣārī's life. At the age of 20, he left for Nishapur for further study of Hadith and Sufism; his avoidance there of any contact with Aṣʿarī-Sufis like al-Quṣayrī suggests that even one's Sufism couldn't redeem one's error of engaging in Kalām. A great orator and fearless activist, al-Anṣārī had two great loves, Ḥan-

83 – On al-Anṣārī's life, see *s.v.* «al-Anṣārī al-Harawī» (Serge de Beaucueil), in *ET*; idem, *Khwādjā ʿAbdallāh Anṣārī (396-481 H./1006-1089), mystique hanbalite*, Beyrouth, Imprimerie catholique, 1965; A. G. Ravan Farhadi, *ʿAbdullah Ansari of Herat (1006-1089 C.E.): An Early Sufi Master*, Richmond, Curzon Press, 1996. Farhadi also includes brief translated sections of the *Manāzil* and other works.

balism and Sufism, and he relentlessly crusaded for both, attempting to bring them together. For an informative profile of his life, see Farhadi's first chapter.

Alexander Knysh suggests that al-Anṣārī thought that al-Ḥaraqānī was the greatest Sufi of all times. However, given al-Anṣārī's explicit statements about the absolute superiority of the early Baghdadi Sufi, al-Ḥarrāz, this is questionable, although he may have thought of al-Ḥaraqānī as the greatest living Sufi. Knysh writes, "A great admirer of al-Bisṭāmī, al-Kharaqānī was a typical charismatic visionary with no formal education who had no interest in high theological speculation. A semiliterate man, who did not know Arabic, he cast his intense mystical experiences in rhymed Persian quatrains and parables. They deal with the already familiar theme: the mystic's all-consuming longing for God that leads him to self-annihilation in the Divine Mystery".⁸⁴ Despite al-Anṣārī's knowledge of Arabic, Hadith and his Ḥanbalism, all of these observations about al-Ḥaraqānī (anti-intellectualism, preference of intensity of expression over accuracy of meaning, and emphasis on annihilation in the Divine,) unmistakably characterize al-Anṣārī's works. Furthermore, al-Anṣārī shared al-Ḥaraqānī's "lack of concern for heaven and hell, which is totally overshadowed by his concentration on their Creator".⁸⁵

B. *Brief Notes on the Ṣad Maydān and the Manāzil*

According to Farhadi, al-Anṣārī dictated the *Manāzil* to his students after he became blind at the age of 74 in 481/1089. That same year he was recognized by the Caliph in Baghdad for his great learning and piety, and was bestowed the title *ṣayḥ al-islām*. More than a dozen years earlier, al-Anṣārī dictated a similar treatise in Persian, the *Ṣad Maydān*, in the main mosque of Herāt.⁸⁶ Massignon suspects that given its form as a collection of definitions, the *Manāzil* was assembled by al-Anṣārī's students posthumously.⁸⁷ Karamustafa notes that the *Ṣad* has the distinction of being the first treatise on Sufism written in Persian.⁸⁸ See below for a note on some of the commentaries on the *Manāzil*.

The description of the stations in both treatises is terse, poetic, play on words, from which commentators have drawn widely divergent meanings. E.g. In the *Ṣad Maydān*, the ninety-eighth field, *mu'āyanah*, reads: "The ninety-eighth field is *mu'āyanah*, which emanates from the ninety-seventh field of contemplation (*muṣāhadah*). Words of God the Exalted, "Have you not seen your Lord how He prolongs the shadow?" (Q. 25:45). *Mu'āyanah* means seeing total perfection, and has three aspects: to regard Love with the eye of compliance, to regard the Unique (*fard*) with the eye of uniqueness, and to regard the Ever-

84 – Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, p. 136.

85 – *Ibid.*

86 – Farhadi, 'Abdullah Ansari, p. 141, 143.

87 – Massignon, *The Passion* (1982), vol. 2, p. 225.

88 – Karamustafa, *Sufism*, p. 95.

Present One (*ḥādīr*) with the eye of attending presence (*ḥudūr*). The exposition of the first entails three things ...”⁸⁹

There is some evidence that the theme of annihilation grows stronger in the *Manāzil*. The final stations of *Ṣad* are: the 97th station is contemplation (*muṣā-hadah*); 98th station is direct observation (*mu‘āyanah*); the 99th station is annihilation (*fanā’*); and the 100th station is subsistence (*baqā’*). This is closer to al-Ġunayd’s doctrine that *fanā’* is a transient moment, and a seeker inevitably adjourns it to live in a state of consciousness and obedience, longing for God (*ba-qā’*).⁹⁰ In the *Manāzil*, however, the last ten stations all emphasize the theme of annihilation, with no attempt to balance it at the end with subsistence. The last stations of the *Manāzil* are entitled *nihāyāt* (the endings), and they consists of gnosis (*ma‘rifah*), annihilation (*fanā’*), subsistence (*baqā’*), actualization (*taḥqīq*), disguise (*talbīs*), existence (*wuġūd*), denudation (*taghrīd*), uniqueness (*tafrīd*), union (*ġam‘*), oneness (*tawḥīd*). Note that *baqā’* (subsistence) has been downgraded in the *Manāzil* to the 93rd station, and the stations that follow all bear the connotation of annihilative union.

C. What Version of al-Anṣārī’s *Manāzil* did Ibn al-Qayyim Use?

I have at my disposal four commentaries on the *Manāzil*, besides the text itself.⁹¹ Besides Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah, two other influential medieval commentators are, ‘Afif al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (d. ca. 690/1291), *Manāzil al-sā’ irin ilā al-ḥaqq al-mubīn*, and ‘Abd al-Razzā Kamāl al-Dīn al-Kašānī (or Qāsānī, d. ca. 730/1329), *Kitāb šarḥ manāzil al-sā’ irin*. There is an early twentieth century Sufi commentary by al-Sayyid Maḥmūd Abū al-Fayḍ al-Manūfī, who was an Azharite Sufi of the Šādīliyyah order.⁹²

Al-Kašānī was an influential interpreter and defender of Ibn ‘Arabī, who wrote a commentary of Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* as well as on al-Anṣārī’s *Manāzil*, and interpreted al-Anṣārī in the light of Ibn ‘Arabī. He lived under the Ilḥans, but little is otherwise known of him,⁹³ and even though he was Ibn Taymiyyah’s contemporary, he is never mentioned by either Ibn Taymiyyah or Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah. Al-Tilimsānī’s commentary is the most important of these, for Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah’s *Madāriġ* can be seen as a response to the monist interpretations offered in it.

It has been suggested that Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah did not have al-Anṣārī’s original text but the one given in al-Tilimsānī’s commentary.⁹⁴ My cross exami-

89 – Farhadi, ‘*Abdullah Ansari*, 70; I have slightly modified Farhadi’s translation.

90 – Karamustafa, *Sufism*, p. 17-18.

91 – Al-Anṣārī al-Harawī, *Manāzil al-sā’ irin ilā al-ḥaqq ḡalla ša’ nuḥu*, ed. Ibrāhīm ‘Aṭwah ‘Awaḍ, Maktabat Ġa‘far al-ḥadīṭiyyah, 1977.

92 – Al-Sayyid Maḥmūd Abū al-Fayḍ al-Manūfī, *al-Tamkīn fī šarḥ manāzil al-sā’ rin*, Cairo, Dār naḥḍat al-Miṣr, n. d.

93 – S.v. «‘Abd al-Razzāq Kamāl al-Dīn al-Kašānī» (D. B. McDonald), in: *EF*.

94 – Serge de Beaucueil, “Un nouveau commentaire des *Manāzil al-sā’ irin*”, *MIDEO* 1 (1954), p. 163.

nation of three medieval commentaries and the two modern editions (‘Awāḍ and Manūfī) suggests, however, a more complicated picture. The two modern editions are identical, except for some omissions in Manūfī (herein M). Al-Tilimsānī (herein T), al-Kāšānī (herein K), and Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah (herein IQ) are more similar to each other than they are to M, but not mutually identical; in some cases, IQ accords more with M rather than with T. Taking a line with unusually numerous variables, we can define the station of ‘ilm, second level:

T (vol. 2, p. 332): *yutbitu fī l-asrār al-ṭāhirah min al-abdān al-zākiyah bi-mā’ al-riyāḍah al-ḥālīṣah*;

K (p. 182): *yunbitu fī l-asrār al-ṭāhirah min al-abrār al-zākiyah bi-mā’ al-riyāḍah al-ḥāṣṣah*;

M (p. 45): *yunbitu fī l-asrār al-zāhirah min al-abdān al-dākiyyah bi-mā’ al-riyāḍah al-ḥālīṣah*.

Now,

IQ (p. 2:441): “*yunbitu* [=K, M, not T] *fī l-asrār al-ṭāhirah* [=T, K, not M] *min al-abdān* [=T, M, not K] *al-zākiyah* [=T, K, not M] *bi-mā’ al-riyāḍah al-ḥālīṣah* [=T, M, not K].” Of the five points of variation, IQ differs once with T, twice with M, and twice with K. There is no clear pattern. There are other places where disagreement with T is more than with the modern text, *e.g.*, in the station of *ḥikmah*, T persistently uses the third person, while M, K and IQ use the second person.

This analysis does not support Beaucueil’s suggestion that Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah only had al-Tilimsānī’s text available; even if we assume that he used al-Tilimsānī’s text as one of the sources, he must have one or more other texts of *Manāzil* as well which he used to correct the former.